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Even when this is agreed, the debtor may not possess a pig of the exact required grade. This leads to fresh transactions with yet other relatives, in which the debtor seeks to exchange such smaller pigs as he possesses against the single larger one demanded of him. In this way the ball rolls on. One transaction leads to another. Every pig-owner, that is to say every male adult, has pigs out on loan and is himself also a debtor to others. No man ever sees all his own pigs around him till the day of his death, when the final effort is made to regulate his affairs. Then, debtors and creditors assemble at his house and, if the latter are lucky and the dying man solvent, a just settlement takes place. If not, the debts are handed on to his successors. No loan is ever forgotten, and, with the additional factor of the uncertain prospect of life of any given pig, the complications never end. Every native complains that he has been cheated of value by others, and disputes leading to the forcible detention, or even the theft, of pigs are not infrequent. Given such a system, and the retentive memories of the natives, it is a tribute to the general common sense of the community and to the solidarity of kinsfolk—for it is only among close kinsfolk that extensive borrowing takes place—that such scenes are not more common than they are.

*Sea-voyages for trade in pigs.*

This short review of the commercial value of pigs has so far been confined within the precincts of Vao and of the neighbouring Small Islands and villages of the adjacent Malekulan mainland, where, owing to intermarriage, a Vao man's maternal kinsfolk often dwell. Perhaps the most striking evidence of the great value attached to them, of the great labour willingly undertaken to preserve and increase the stock, and of the risks endured to prosecute this end, is that of the sea-voyages organised almost exclusively for the sake of obtaining fresh supplies, to make up for the loss caused by the sacrifice of immense numbers of tusked pigs during the course of innumerable rites. The construction and consecration of these sea-going canoes, by means of yet further sacrifice, will be described in a separate chapter.[1] Apart from the trade in turmeric leaves, obtained from the islands of Malo and Santo in return for pigs, and in a few other objects, such as special kinds of bark brought home from Ambrim for the construction of high-grade bark-board belts, also paid for with pigs, and in fine dancing-aprons used in a special kind of dance which are obtained from Oba, the sole commercial object of these voyages is the purchase of fresh stocks of pigs. Whatever the original use of these great canoes—and it is certain that they were, among other things, the vessels by means of which some portion at least of the ancestors of the existing population arrived on Vao—it is the trade in pigs that is now the prime object of their manufacture. For this purpose the immense labour of building them is

[1] Chapter XVII.

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439 undertaken, large numbers of tusked pigs are sacrificed in order to consecrate them, and the effect of this consecration is to make them taboo to
484 women. In them the natives sail to all the large islands of the Northern
[501] New Hebrides, to Ambrim, Raga, Oba, Maewo, Malo and Santo. The chief sources of pigs are Ambrim and South Raga. Oba is chiefly visited on account of its reputation as the Land of Ta-ghar and for the special initiation rite performed there, but the trade in pigs with this island is now slight owing to its recent depopulation. Maewo, also known as the home of Ta-ghar, is now rarely visited. The trade with Malo and Santo is with pigs and turmeric leaves.

Voyages to the southern and eastern islands are usually made by night, the canoes leaving Vao in the late afternoon, and arriving at their destination some time during the following morning. Here they may stay anything up to five days, and then wait for a fair wind to take them home. The days are spent in bargaining. Emotion runs high, and there are many records of fights arising out of disputes, in some of which the visitors manage to save themselves, but in others they are slain and in most cases eaten. Individual accounts of such voyages as undertaken from Atchin will be given in a later volume.

To such lengths will the natives go to keep up their supply of pigs.

*Value of tusked boars in terms of English money.*

435 Before seeking the underlying reason for this passionate search, one more fact may be mentioned to show the immense value attached to these
436 animals. During the time of my visit there was but little European money
434 in the Small Islands, acquired chiefly by means of the very low wages earned by the indentured labour undertaken by some of the younger men on white men's plantations, supplemented by the selling of a little copra to passing white men's trading-vessels. The amount of money thus made is not very great. What they do make is partly spent in buying white men's goods, such as an occasional singlet or piece of corrugated iron, partly saved up to buy whalers which now replace the sea-going canoes I have just mentioned, and partly used for trading among themselves, in which case it usually replaces their own money-mats. Pigs are not
435 often sold for money, but when this does happen, the prices they fetch are such as to astound the white man, who fails to understand what it is all about. Thus, when I was on Atchin, prices averaged:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| For a crescent-tusker | . | about £4 [1] |
| „ curved-tusker . | . | „ £6 |
| „ re-entrant-tusker | . | „ £10, £12 or £15 |
| „ circle-tusker . | . | from £30 upwards. |

[1] Deacon (4, p. 391), six years later, cites a crescent-tusker in Seniang, there called *mbong matüs*, as being worth £5, with corresponding prices for pigs of lower grade.

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# CHAPTER XX

## THE PILGRIMAGE TO OBA

### (INITIATION INTO SEX)

AS has already been pointed out,[1] Initiation into Sex follows after Initiation into Manhood, and is a separate rite re-introduced into the Small Islands in comparatively recent times and carried out, not on the Small Islands themselves, but on one of the matrilineal islands of Oba, Maewo or North Raga in the Northern New Hebrides, of which the chief is Oba.

These islands are collectively regarded as the "Land of Ta-ghar." It is as such the natives regard them when making this journey, and for this reason that I propose to call this rite the Pilgrimage to Oba.[2]

This island lies some sixty miles away over the open sea, and is the chief among those visited by the sea-going canoes of the Small Islands in the trade for pigs. At the outset of all such voyages outside the waters immediately surrounding the Small Islands a special communion rite is held, prayers being offered to the ancestors for its success.[3] Moreover, however hard-headed the bargains in pigs made on these distant islands, the journey to Oba is fraught with mystery, and led by a ghostly shark with which travellers in canoes from Atchin make contact off the island of Wala whence the first such expedition was made. The tale told on Atchin is that a Wala man named Ni-mbel turned himself into a shark and, swimming under water, snatched a fine mat-skirt that had been put out on the beach to dry and, bringing it back, gave it to his wife, whereon all the girls on the Small Islands wanted similar ones. After this each youth wanted a like gift for his girl, and so the rite started, the shark Ni-mbel to this day still leading the canoe and the newly initiated youths returning with fine Oba mats.[4]

The rite is a 10-day one with a re-birth ceremony on the 5th day,[5]

[1] See pp. 473, 475.

[2] According to Suas, 1912, p. 61, the inhabitants of the Lolopwepwe district of Oba actually call their own land *vanua i Takaro*, "land of Takaro (Ta-ghar)," or *vanua kokona*, "holy land."

[3] Examples of such prayers will be given in a future volume.

[4] This story, as told on Atchin, will appear in full in a future volume. For another version see Harrisson, 2, p. 106, who states that the supposed occurrence took place some eighteen generations ago.

[5] Speiser, 3, p. 288, states that the whole rite lasts only five days (see also p. 525).

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thus showing its connexion with the older form of initiation ritual preceding the introduction of 30- and 7-day periods found in the later forms of Initiation into Manhood.

As already stated,[1] Initiation into Sex as carried out from the Small Islands differs from Initiation into Manhood also in that, while Initiation into Manhood is a communal rite organised for all boys and youths of a given section of society, Initiation into Sex is a much more individual affair, only those boys who, having already undergone one series of compulsory ordeals, feel themselves strong and desirous enough voluntarily to undertake fresh trials offering to go.

Till then they must sleep along with those newly initiated into manhood in the initiation house. But they are nevertheless free to roam about with due circumspection providing they observe the initial restrictions about meeting women. Sooner or later they will learn that their elders are planning a trading expedition to Oba. No youth who has not yet been initiated into manhood may go on these expeditions. But now, if any youth has made up his mind to go, he will, secretly and without saying a word to any one, turn up at the launching of the canoe. Here he will meet others who have similarly but in all secrecy made up their minds, and their ordeals immediately begin.

Such is the case on Atchin, where I myself accompanied one of these expeditions, of which a detailed account will be given in another volume. This is one of the rites of which I did not obtain an account on Vao, so that I am unable to give details of the pilgrimage as undertaken from this island. Godefroy, however, gives a very incomplete account which I will quote here as giving some idea of the essential structure of the rite.

## GODEFROY'S BRIEF ACCOUNT

According to Godefroy's account,[2] taken from the lips of Melteg-lil-nale, the elders undertake a special voyage for this purpose. Pigs, fowls and yams are offered to the ancestors, to whom supplications are made to look favourably on the novices, to change the direction of contrary winds and to minimise the force of currents and tidal waves.

On the eve of departure a tall bamboo is set up on the shore facing the beach from which they leave, and on this are hung dry coconuts, conch shells and consecrated herbs. On the day of departure itself the canoe [3] is loaded with provisions, fresh coconuts for drink, and lastly the pigs. According to Godefroy, the novices adorn themselves for the journey,

[1] See p. 476.
[2] Godefroy, I, 1933, pp. 231-2.
[3] In Godefroy's account it is a modern whaler. On Atchin these voyages always start in the afternoon, so that when night comes there will be stars to guide them, whereas by day there would be nothing but the wind, which often changes. By dawn they reckon to be within sight of Oba.

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their arms decorated with finely plaited arm-badges and their hair with pink and golden ferns. If the rites on Vao are, however, anything like those on Atchin, this statement is far from true. There, the attitude on leaving is, as I have said, one of extreme effacement. Nor would there be any use in so adorning themselves, since the moment they enter the canoe they are made to lie on the floor, covered with mats, stones, paddles, food baskets, coconuts, whole bunches of bananas and all the odds and ends that are carried in the canoe. It is not till they return that they adorn themselves in all the finery of conquering youth.

Once arrived on Oba, the adult members of the expedition go to the inland villages to trade in pigs, leaving the novices and their tutors to carry out the necessary rites, of which the most important are these: [1]

"As they leave the canoe they must ritually bathe, that is to say they must not plunge into the water, but, standing in it only up to their knees, they must, with solemn motions, sprinkle [2] the sea-water copiously over their shoulders, chest, head and arms. Then they unload the provisions which they have brought: wild yams, bananas and coconuts. While bathing and unloading they must remain silent, not uttering a word. Complete silence is obligatory not only now, but during the whole of their sojourn in Oba, as well as during the voyage, both outward and homeward.[3]

"During the whole of the time they maintain a severe fast. It is indeed a hard fast to be restricted to two or three bananas and poor-quality yams a day.

"On the three last days there is a curious rite. For each novice they dig a shallow pit in which they lie on their backs and are covered with plaited coconut leaves. On the fourth day [4] the buried youths rise from the dead, still silent.

"Then, all now being on their feet, they load the canoes with the pigs bought by their elders.

"If the wind is in the proper quarter for sailing home (and they say that at this moment it always is), they pull up the anchor at about four o'clock in the afternoon and next dawn arrive triumphantly at Vao." [5]

Speiser adds (what also occurs on Atchin) that while the novices are away some of their coconut trees and part of their yam-gardens are destroyed.[6]

[1] In the case of the pilgrimage as carried out from Atchin, the Atchinese have a special Lodge built by the shore, which they occupy and in which they enjoy a kind of diplomatic immunity from attack.

[2] Godefroy uses the religious term "asperge."

[3] This is probably a mistake. As the pilgrimage is performed from Atchin, the ban is lifted on the return voyage.

[4] This almost certainly means the fifth day. Confusion as to dates often arises owing to the twenty-four-hour period beginning at sundown.

[5] Godefroy, 1, 1933, pp. 132-3. Here is another confusion. Twice elsewhere he states that the rite lasts ten days.

[6] Speiser, 3, p. 288.